

up colour photograph of the illustration, I immediately recognised the living birds in my view.

Shivraj Kumar who followed a little later immediately noticed the bird which flew away. The altitude we saw the pair in May was about 8,000'. The forests on the mountains above were mainly oak admixed with Rhododendron. I am certain that the bird occurs vary much to the west in suitable habitats.

It is quite apparent that in a large country like ours, the exact ranges of birds will be extended as more and more people take to observing birds send in their information to the Society. Equally true is the fact that many more species must be becoming rare or totally exterminated as the habitat is being damaged by exploitation by Man.

C/o. WORLD WILDLIFE FUND-INDIA, LAVKUMAR J. KHACHER
HORNBILL HOUSE, OPP. LION GATE,
SHAHID BHAGAT SINGH ROAD,
BOMBAY 400 023,
January 7, 1975.

16. OBSERVATIONS ON A YOUNG CHEQUERED KEELBACK SNAKE (*XENOCHROPHIS PISCATOR*)

The snake was captured in a stream near Poona on 30-vi-1974. The best efforts at measuring its length put this at about ten inches. When it was released into another stream on 6-x-1974, the length was estimated at fourteen inches. The body remained very slender throughout the period of captivity. During these 98 days the snake was kept in a circular glass fish-bowl $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter and the same in depth. Three small tiles were piled up in the centre of the bowl in such a way as to leave a hiding-place beneath the lowest tile, and sufficient space all round for swimming. Water was added until the surface of the topmost tile was just clear. It was soon found necessary to cover the mouth of the bowl with wire gauze in order to prevent escape. Small "minnows" ranging in length from about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to 2 inches were introduced into the bowl from time to time. These were taken, sometimes at once, sometimes after a few days, and sometimes even when dead. Feeding took place both by day and by night. Very small fishes were usually ignored, even when the snake must have been hungry. The preferred length was observed to be from 1 to $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Average daily consumption seemed to be about four fishes.

Usually the selected fish would be closely but cautiously approached and then seized by a sudden dart. Seizure would be by the head, middle or tail. Fish were swallowed most easily from a head seizure, but could also be swallowed, after a struggle, from the tail. Once a fish

that was presumably found too lively was lifted and swallowed out of the water; otherwise, all were devoured under water.

So long as the snake remained motionless (as it often did with its head and fore-part perpendicular in the manner of a stalk of water-grass) the fishes showed not the least fear of their predator, and would approach quite close. This lack of fear was equally shown when the snake gently undulated its upper part like a swaying weed.

Skins were sloughed on about 17 July, 7 August, 10 September and 6 October. Dates must be approximate, since the sloughed skins were so inconspicuous in the water that they may not have been noticed until a day or so after being cast.

The snake settled down in captivity quite readily. At first it spent nearly all the time hiding under the lowest tile, only coming out to breathe or feed. It was at first easily scared by any movements outside the bowl, but after a few days it grew used to these.

In the early morning it was often found resting on the top tile out of water. At night it often climbed up to the mouth of the bowl, where it would lie, well concealed, around the inner rim; hence the necessity of keeping the bowl covered with wire gauze. Once, when the cover was accidentally left off for some time, the snake escaped from the bowl and was found lying on the shelf at a distance of one foot or so. When I seized it by the middle, it made as if to bite, but did not actually do so; instead, it sprayed some foul-smelling liquid—presumably, excreta—over my hand before I could replace it in the bowl.

When coming up for air, the snake would thrust its head clear of the water and “drink” the air by working the muscles of its throat. On 17 July, a little before the first sloughed skin was detected, it pushed its head above water and yawned several times.

The snake was released because I could no longer spare the time to catch a constant supply of minnows. Eventually, of course, it would have grown too large for the bowl. For anyone with the time and resources to maintain a food supply, a juvenile Water-snake can be recommended as an unusual and interesting pet.

It is non-poisonous and—in my own experience—non-aggressive.

DEV KUNJ,
PRABHAT ROAD,
POONA 411 004,
January 10, 1975.

THOMAS GAY